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Memorandum Re International Water Authority for the Middle East

As a means of relaxing tensions in the Middle East, it would be useful if some major projects could be developed which would be on a regional rather than a national basis. The Middle East has a plethora of oil and a shortage of water, or at least water that is at present harnessed and properly used. There are a series of major projects -- the Aswan Dam, the Jordan Valley, the Tigris Euphrates, etc., etc. Some consideration has also been given to the establishment, say in the Gaza Strip, of nuclear reactors which would make fresh water out of salt. While the development of this principle is still in the early planning stage, it is clear that if it is to be done it has to be on a very large scale in order to get the costs within any reasonable limits.

It is suggested that study be given to the constitution, possibly under UN auspices, of a Middle East International Water Authority which would devote itself to all such projects, or where there was already a national project, would supplement the national effort, or bi-national or tri-national as the case might be. It is conceivable that one might call upon those countries, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, etc., for a contribution to this authority, say five per cent of all production, and possibly seek some comparable contribution from the foreign operating companies, chiefly British and American. This would be supplemented by grants from UN members, particularly U.S., Britain, etc., and the International Bank. We would then be in a position to call upon the Soviet for an appropriate contribution from them and this would test out their willingness to participate in a peaceful and highly important economic development project.

The outlines of this scheme are obviously very vague and are merely presented as a basis for examining whether there is any reality to the project. It might at least serve to put to the test the real intentions of countries like Egypt and Israel, as well as the Soviet Union.

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Allen W. Dulles
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